



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 2
290 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, NY 10007-1866

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Schumer:

Thank you for your June 27, 2017 letter to Administrator Scott Pruitt urging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to use its technical expertise and resources to assist state and local officials to evaluate all potential present and historical sources of radioactive materials at the Northrop Grumman/US Naval Weapons Industrial Reserve Plant (the Site). Your letter has been forwarded to me for reply.

As you are aware, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) has the lead regulatory role with respect to this Site. EPA, in its oversight role under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), has been working closely with NYSDEC on cleanup activities at the Site. Several years ago, EPA initiated quarterly review meetings with the key stakeholders at the Site, with the goals of improving coordination and communication and expediting the Site cleanup. These meetings are attended by EPA, NYSDEC, the New York State Department of Health, the Navy, Northrop Grumman, Massapequa Water District, South Farmingdale Water District, Bethpage Water District (BWD), and the Town of Hempstead Water Department. The shutdown of the BWD Well #4-1 due to low-level detections of radiological contamination has been a topic of discussion at the quarterly meetings. While the possibility that the Site was the source of these radiological detections is being investigated in several ways, consideration also has been given as to whether the elevated radiological contamination in the groundwater is naturally occurring, related to operations at the Site, or operations at other facilities in the area, as discussed in more detail, below.

During the 2015 coordination meetings, the participating water districts requested that additional groundwater sampling be performed for radium. Northrop Grumman performed additional sampling of a series of wells in 2015. The results revealed a few locations where radium was slightly above the drinking water standard; however, these detections were sporadically located and did not indicate pattern of contamination or a specific source of the radium. Although radium is only moderately soluble in water, under certain conditions it can enter a groundwater system by dissolution from minerals present in an aquifer. According to studies by United States Geologic Survey (USGS), detectable radium concentrations are present in soils comprising the North Atlantic Coastal Plain, which includes Long Island. Studies on North Atlantic Coastal Plain soils in New Jersey by USGS (in cooperation with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection) indicated that water chemistry, rather than the radium content of the aquifer soils, was primarily responsible for higher levels in groundwater.

The water districts also recommended that additional data be gathered to determine whether radiological materials were used at the Site during production years, and NYSDEC agreed to do so. As noted in your letter, in 2016 Northrop Grumman responded to NYSDEC's request for information regarding the use of radiological materials at the Site with a nine-page report entitled, "Investigation of Radioactive Materials at Northrop Grumman's Bethpage Facility." In that report, Northrop Grumman concludes "In general, the use, handling and disposal of radiological materials at the site during the documented period were consistent with contemporaneous industry standards." Northrop Grumman did not provide any details on its historical use, storage, or disposal of radiological materials at the Site. EPA agrees that a more definitive response should be sought from Northrop Grumman concerning its use, storage, or disposal of radiological materials at the Site, and will work with NYSDEC to seek further clarification from Northrop Grumman.

EPA has offered its assistance to NYSDEC with respect to the investigation of radium in groundwater (whether naturally occurring or resulting from operations) near the Site. EPA staff representing the Superfund, RCRA, radiation and drinking water programs have discussed the investigation of radium in the groundwater in the vicinity of the Site, as well as at the Bethpage High School Campus, the potential sources of the radium, and the need for additional information from Northrop Grumman regarding its use of radioactive materials at the Site. NYSDEC is actively gathering information that can be used to better define the situation at the Site. NYSDEC has: (1) requested additional information from Northrop Grumman related to past use of radiological materials at their Bethpage Facility; (2) performed a radiation survey inside of the Plant 26 buildings on June 30, 2017 and found no evidence of any above-background radiation levels, except from one granite lab table (slightly elevated natural radiation is typically emitted by granite); (3) performed split sampling of the shallow groundwater at the Bethpage High School campus, and (4) initiated inquiries regarding the use of radiological materials at 43 state superfund sites in Long Island, as well as nine landfills that may have taken waste from operations at those sites.

NYSDEC will share the results of its investigations with EPA, other stakeholders and the public as it becomes available later this year. EPA will continue to coordinate with NYSDEC to better understand presence of the radium in the aquifer and any potential actions that may be required to address the radium

If you have further questions, please contact me at (212) 637-5000 or Mike McGowan, Chief of the Intergovernmental and Community Affairs Branch, at (212) 637-4972.

Sincerely,

Catherine McCabe
Acting Regional Administrator